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ABSTRACT

Division of labor in the family is viewed as an indicator of relative power and justice in a marital relationship. During the transition to parenthood it becomes one of the most salient correlates of marital satisfaction. This study examines the relationship between the division of family labor and marital quality as well as changes in this relationship during the first child's transition to school. The results show that while the overall way family labor is divided between spouses remains relatively constant across this transition, satisfaction with labor division increases while marital satisfaction declines. However, husbands' greater participation in family labor is associated with higher marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives. During the transition to school, the quality of parents' marriage can be explained in part by the relationships among wife's work characteristics, spouses' ideal and actual labor division, and their satisfaction with the division. In families where wives have a higher work status, both spouses have ideals of more equal labor division, actual labor is divided more equally, and both spouses are more satisfied with labor division, which in turn is associated with higher marital quality.

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Who Does What, Why, and How It Affects Parental Relationships During Children's Transition to School

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Division of labor in the family is viewed as an indicator of relative power and justice in a marital relationship. During the transition to parenthood it becomes one of the most salient correlates of marital satisfaction. This study examines the relationship between the division of family labor and marital quality as well as changes in this relationship during the first child's transition to school. The results show that while the overall way family labor is divided between spouses remains relatively constant across this transition, satisfaction with labor division increases, whereas marital satisfaction declines. However, husbands' greater participation in family labor is associated with higher marital satisfaction for both husbands and wives. During the transition to school, the quality of parents' marriage can be explained in part by the relationships among wife's work characteristics, spouses' ideal and actual labor division, and their satisfaction with the division. In families where wives have a higher work status both spouses have ideals of more equal labor division, actual labor is divided more equally, and both spouses are more satisfied with labor division, which in turn is associated with higher marital quality.



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INTRODUCTION

- Division of labor in the family is considered an indicator of relative power and justice in a marital relationship (Greenstein, 1996). As such, it becomes the core relationship issue during the *transition to parenthood* (Cowan & Cowan, 1988). Does it remain similarly salient during the *transition to school*?
- Although the dual-*paid* work reality created expectations for dual-*unpaid* (family) work reality, both employed and non-employed women still do the lion's share of family work (Demo & Acock, 1993). Why, while feeling overwhelmed and overloaded, do only 1/3 of wives feel that the unequal division of labor is *unfair* (Barnett & Baruch, 1987)?
- The more husbands contribute to family labor, the more their *wives* are satisfied with labor division and the marriage (Thompson & Walker, 1989). How does husbands' contribution relate to *their own* satisfaction?
- Actual labor *division* is associated with marital satisfaction, and so is *satisfaction* with labor division (Benin & Agostinelli, 1988). Which is more important, the reality or its evaluation?

PURPOSES

- Explore the relationship between labor division and marital quality and changes in this relationship during the first child's transition to school.
- Identify and examine social/psychological mediators of the relationship between labor division and marital quality.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

- The subjects were participants in the larger *School Children and Their Families* project (Cowan & Cowan, 1997).
- This study included only those 54 families who had completed all the measures of interest.
- The data were collected before the first child entered kindergarten, at the end of the kindergarten year, and again after the child's completion of first grade.
- 89% of the subjects were Caucasian and 11% were African-American, Asian-American, or Hispanic.
- All parents were employed at least part-time.

- The average family income for these 2-parent dual-worker San Francisco Bay Area families was \$84,259 (ranging from \$19,000 to \$250,000).

MEASURES

- Who Does What? (Cowan & Cowan, 1990a).

This self-report instrument assesses perceptions of relative responsibility for household tasks and childcare as well as satisfaction with tasks division. Each spouse rates his/her relative involvement in 13 household and 20 childcare tasks. The first of the 2 identical parts measures current labor division, the second measures ideal or preferred division of tasks. The second part is used here as a proxy for gender role ideology.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
<i>she does it all</i>										<i>he does it all</i>

- The Short Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959).

This 16-item self-report instrument differentiates clinically distressed from nondistressed couples. It provides a global index of marital satisfaction and an overall marital conflict score.

- Work and Family Life (Schulz, 1994).

This self-report measure assesses various aspects of one's outside employment (i.e., income, hours of work).

- The Pie (Cowan & Cowan, 1990b).

This instrument assesses one's sense of psychological involvement in his/her major life roles and relationships.

RESULTS -

GOAL I: To examine the division of labor in the family and its changes during the first child's transition to school.

Procedures:

1. Descriptive Statistics
2. Two by three (gender by time) Analyses of Variance.

Results:

- The overall household labor is divided relatively *equally* between spouses. However, spouses perform significantly more of the tasks traditionally assigned to their gender (women cook and clean while men care for cars and yards).
- The overall childcare is divided relatively *unequally* between spouses (women do more childcare than men).
- Ideally, husbands and wives prefer that the overall household labor division stays *the same* and that women do not only *more* childcare than men, but also *more* of it than they used to do before the transition.

- The ways household and childcare tasks are divided between spouses remain relatively *constant* across the transition to school.

Insert Table 1 about here

GOAL II: To examine *between-spouse differences* and *time changes* in psychological involvement in housekeeping, satisfaction with labor division, and marital quality.

Procedures: Two by three (gender by time) Analyses of Variance.

Results:

- Both spouses report *increasingly less* involvement in housekeeping roles during the transition to school.
- Wives perceive a significantly *greater inequality* in both household and childcare division and are much more *dissatisfied* with labor division than their husbands.
- Husbands and wives become increasingly *more satisfied* with labor division during the transition.
- Both spouses report *similar* levels of marital satisfaction, and these levels *decline* during the transition.

Insert Table 2 about here

GOAL III: To examine the relationship between labor division and marital quality.

Procedure: Latent variables path analyses with partial least squares estimation: pre-transition, post-transition, and short-term longitudinal models for each spouse.

Results:

- The patterns of relationships among the variables are similar for husbands and wives before and after the transition to school.
- A significant amount of variance in marital quality can be explained by a combination of wife's work characteristics, spouse's ideal and actual labor division, and his/her satisfaction with the division:

<i>Before transition</i>	27% ♂	16% ♀
<i>After transition</i>	40% ♂	28% ♀

- In families where wives have a higher work status, husbands and wives tend to have more

egalitarian ideals of labor division, divide actual labor more equally, be more satisfied with labor division, and enjoy higher marital quality.

- When partners with egalitarian ideology share family labor equally, both of them are satisfied with labor division; if ideals of equal labor division are not accompanied by equality of actual labor division, they are associated with dissatisfaction with labor division.
- Labor division-related variables contribute little to explain post-transition marital quality over and above pre-transition marital quality.

Insert Table 3 about here

CONCLUSIONS

- During the first child's transition to school the issue of labor division in the family is *much less salient* for marital satisfaction than it is during the transition to parenthood.
- During the transition to school, household labor is divided relatively equally between spouses, while childcare is not, with women doing a greater share than men. The ways in which family labor is divided between spouses remain *stable* during this transition.
- Women perceive much *greater inequality* and are much *less satisfied* with labor division than men.
- Although satisfaction with labor division *increases* while marital satisfaction *decreases* during the transition for both spouses, husbands' *greater participation* in family labor is associated with *higher marital satisfaction* not only for their wives, but also for the husbands themselves.
- In families where wives have a higher work status, both husbands and wives have ideals of more equal labor division, actual labor tends to be divided more equally, and both spouses feel more satisfied with labor division, which in turn is associated with *higher marital quality*.

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Table 1: Analyses of Variance: Gender Differences and Time Changes*

Variables	Time F	Gender F	Time by Gender F
Family tasks division	.13	17.44***	.67
Equality of family tasks division	.68	4.14*	1.10
Ideal family tasks division	.42	7.35**	1.56
Satisfaction with family tasks division (difference score)	7.75***	6.09*	3.21*
Satisfaction with family tasks division (global)	.18	6.02*	.89
Conflict over family tasks division	.17	.01	1.25
Child tasks division	.14	14.42***	.12
Equality of child tasks division	.34	16.41***	1.56
Ideal child tasks division	3.74*	2.94	.15
Satisfaction with child tasks division (difference score)	3.33*	18.88***	.92
Satisfaction with child tasks division (global)	1.13	3.26	.10
Marital satisfaction	3.14*	1.58	.52
Total amount of marital conflict	.19	.57	.45

Table 2: Analyses of Variance: Psychological Role Involvement (the Pie)*

Roles	Time F	Gender F	Time by Gender F
Parent	.56	14.65***	.41
Partner	.17	3.74	.32
Lover	.86	.50	.21
Housekeeper	4.13*	1.23	.15
Worker	1.43	17.38***	.58

*Covariates: Family Income, Wife's Relative Income, and Wife's Hours of Paid Employment.

Table 3: Latent Variable Path Analysis with Partial Least Squares Component Loadings on Manifest Variables, Before and After Transition.

Variable	Pre-Transition		Post-Transition	
	Husbands	Wives	Husbands	Wives
Wife's Work Status				
Work hours	.92	.93	.91	.91
Relative income	.90	.90	.91	.92
Presence of younger siblings	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Ideology				
Husband's ideal involvement in household tasks	.65	.75	.83	.71
Husband's ideal involvement in childcare tasks	.93	.87	.87	.81
Actual Labor division				
Husband's involvement in household tasks	.78	.85	.72	.74
Husband's involvement in childcare tasks	.92	.84	.91	.90
Satisfaction with labor division				
Household tasks	.79	.92	.88	.87
Childcare tasks	.84	.91	.87	.90
Marital quality				
Amount of Conflict	-.84	-.85	-.96	-.88
Satisfaction	.87	.84	.71	.92

Figure 1. Path Model: Husbands Before Transition (RMS=.06)

